

The Burning Furnace of Daniel 3

Aramaic¹

Dan. 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold (זָלָטָם דִּי־דְרָחְמָא) (εἰκόνα χρυσοῦν), the height of which was sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar²

605-560 B.C.

Dan. 3:2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent *word* to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Dan. 3:3 Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Dan. 3:4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every language*,

Dan. 3:5 that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.³

Dan. 3:6 “But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.”

Dan. 3:7 Therefore, at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every language* fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Dan. 3:8 For this reason, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.

Dan. 3:9 They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king, “O king, live forever!

Dan. 3:10 “You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image.

Dan. 3:11 “But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.

Dan. 3:12 “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

Dan. 3:13 Then, in a rage and anger, Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring Shadrach,

¹ Daniel 1:1-2:4 is written in Hebrew, along with 8:1-12:13. The rest of Daniel, 2:5-7:28 is written in Aramaic.

² **Babylonian** **Persian (Mede)** **Greek** **Syrian Greek** **Egyptian Greek** **Roman** M.E. Messianic

³ Because the image represented not only the chief god of the Babylonians (Marduk?) but also Nebuchadnezzar himself as Marduk’s proxy on earth.

Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Thus, these men were brought before the king.

Dan. 3:14 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?”

Dan. 3:15 “Thus, if you are willing, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?”

Dan. 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.

Dan. 3:17 “If this happens, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire. Thus, He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

Dan. 3:18 “But *even* if *He* does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Dan. 3:19 As a result, Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

Dan. 3:20 He commanded certain valiant warriors who *were* in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in order to cast *them* into the furnace of blazing fire.

Dan. 3:21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps, and their *other* clothes and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire.

Dan. 3:22 Because the king’s command was urgent, and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Dan. 3:23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up.

Dan. 3:24 Then, Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste. He said to his high officials, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.”

Dan. 3:25 He said, “Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods (דְּמֻתָּהּ לְבֶרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים) (ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ)!”⁴

Dan. 3:26 So, Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire, and he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God (עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה הַגָּדֹל) (οἱ παῖδες τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν θεῶν τοῦ

⁴ What exactly Nebuchadnezzar means by “like a son of gods” (דְּמֻתָּהּ לְבֶרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים) (ὁμοίωμα ἀγγέλου θεοῦ) is difficult to say, except that it may have been a Babylonian expression for someone who is striking in appearance and, therefore, noticeably different from other sort of normal people, who would not be so noticeable if someone passed them on the street so to speak. The LXX is helpful in that these translators used the phrase ἀγγέλος θεοῦ, most likely thinking that Nebuchadnezzar, similar to the Hebrew Bible that uses this phrase to refer to a theophany, i.e., a manifestation of the transcendent God within the creation (cf. Genesis 18, Exodus 3), considered this fourth man to be just exactly this, even as his chief god Marduk might have appeared on earth if he wanted to. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar has concluded that the very god whom these Jewish men has indeed delivered them from not only the fire, but also from him. In other words, their god truly is greater than his.

ὕψιστου), and come here!” Therefore, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came out of the midst of the fire.⁵

Dan. 3:27 The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king’s high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men. Nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them.

Dan. 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who has sent His angel (מַלְאָכָא) (τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ) and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

Dan. 3:29 “Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.”

Dan. 3:30 Afterwards, the king caused Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

⁵ This verse lends evidence to the effect that the correct way to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s phrase “like a son of gods” above is correct in that 1) he labels Shadrach and his Jewish friends as servants of the Most High God (שְׂרָפְדִּים וְשָׂרְפָדִּים וְשָׂרְפָדִּים) (οἱ παῖδες τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν θεῶν τοῦ ὑψίστου). The people of the ANE each had a Most High God, who was within their pantheon the biggest, baddest god of all, including bigger and badder than other people’s Most High God. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that the Jewish God is bigger and badder than the Babylonian Most High God (Marduk?), because He has protected these Jews from the fire of the furnace, while his own elite soldiers were killed by it simply by getting too close when they threw Shadrach and his friends into it. If Marduk is so great, then why did he not protect these soldiers from the heat of the fire as the Jewish God has done so? Obviously, because Marduk is no where near as powerful as Shadrach’s Most High God. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar can only assume that the fourth man, who clearly is escaping the destruction of the fire just as the three Jews are, is a theophany of their Most High God. Then, 2) only Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego exit the furnace. Where is the fourth man? He simply disappears, because he is strictly a theophany of the transcendent Creator and has served his purpose of being with the three Jewish men until they exit the furnace. And Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the nature of this man as the Jews’ God’s appearance within the creation, which God is greater than his. The Jewish God has won, and Nebuchadnezzar admits to this fact.

It is also interesting to note that the third man’s name, Abed-Nego, means “servant of Nego,” and that the Aramaic word *abed* (עֲבָד) is the same word that Nebuchadnezzar uses to describe these three Jewish men as “servants of the Most High God.” Consequently, even though the Babylonians had given him the name Abed-Nego, indicating to them that he was a servant of one of their gods named Nego (?), Nebuchadnezzar can see that he serves a much greater god, indeed greater than Marduk, their chief god.